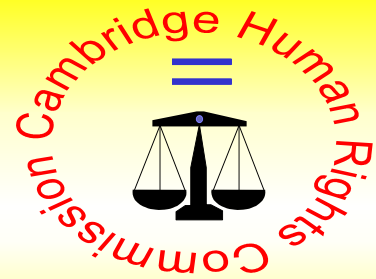


CAMBRIDGE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



DATELINE

Newsletter of the Cambridge Human Rights Commission



SUMMER 2003



Meet the Staff



Quoc M. Tran
Executive Director

Quoc has been with the Cambridge Human Rights Commission since 1999. He is an attorney. Having worked at the state's Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination office, he came to the Commission with plenty of experience on discrimination cases. Both Quoc and his wife are from Vietnam. They have 4 beautiful children, whom he adores.



Carmen S. Negrón
Office Manager/Project Coord.

You probably have already met Carmen; she's been around for quite a while. Carmen has worked for the City of Cambridge for 19 years and in the Cambridge Human Rights Commission for 14 years. She's an active member of the City's Employee Diversity Committee and the Massachusetts Association on Human Rights Commissions. Last year she was honored with the City's Employee of the Year Award. Carmen is a native of the beautiful island of Puerto Rico. She has lived in the states for most of her life. Carmen has 3 children and 2 granddaughters, all of whom she is very proud of.

Contents

Meet the Staff.....	1-2
Welcome New Commissioners on Board.....	2
Highlights of 10 th Annual Fair Housing Month Celebration.....	3
Winning Essays.....	4-5
Innovations in Fair Housing Awards.....	5
Discrimination Awareness.....	6
Recent Closed Cases.....	7
Fair Housing v. Affordable Housing.....	8



Sonja DeWitt
Investigative Attorney

Sonja began working at the Commission as a law student intern in 1995. She graduated and became an attorney in 1997 and has continued to work for the Commission since then.

She is responsible for investigating and mediating discrimination cases of all types as well as providing trainings to individuals and organizations regarding discrimination issues. She lives with her family in Jamaica Plain.



Joseph Johnson
Outreach Coordinator

Joe has been working for the Commission under a FHIP Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development. The outreach and education grant includes the establishment of a speaker's bureau, interactive web pages, and the design of multi-lingual brochures. Joe has conducted workshops and forums on fair housing and civil rights and he will be working on a video project for the Commission. Joe is a native of Trinidad and his wife is from Costa Rica. He is one of 11 children, and has 3 children Joe Jr., Jennifer, and Shanaye.



Lalitha Gunturi
Law Student Intern

Lalitha is a law student at Boston University and has been working with us since June and will be here for the summer and will continue to work part-time in the fall. Lalitha was born in India where she recently went back to visit.

Welcome New Commissioners on Board



Karen Leiter

Currently a consultant to public health programs, Karen has worked in the areas of civil and human rights and community health for the past ten years, as an advocate, researcher, trainer and educator. Most recently she assisted the Cambridge Health Alliance Department of

Community Affairs with the evaluation of programs under the umbrella of the Immigrant Health Improvement Project. Karen has also served as a policy/research specialist and instructor of public health practice at the Harvard School of Public Health, focusing on international strategies for ending violence against women and girls.

Trained as an attorney as well as in public health, Karen has been a litigator for the ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project, an assistant counsel to the New York State Assembly and a research assistant at the Domestic Violence Institute at Northeastern Law School. Karen spent six months in 1999-2000 in Latin America, mostly in Santiago, Chile as a volunteer for two non-profit organizations, a collective that trains community health promoters and a human rights lawyers group. At EPES (Popular Education in Health), she helped to organize a community education workshop on women's rights and conducted research on recent legal reform, community resources and shantytown women's strategies for confronting family violence. At CODEPU (the Corporation for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the People), Karen assisted with the legal case against Augusto Pinochet in Chile.

Karen grew up in the Boston area and has lived in Cambridge since 2000.



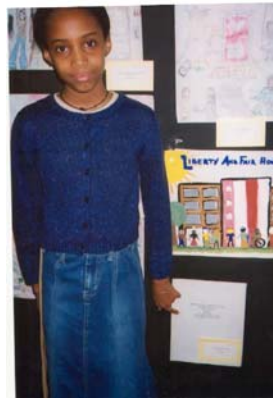
Julie Patiño

One of the Commission's newest members, Julie Patiño, is a civil rights attorney with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, where she specializes in advocacy involving race and national origin discrimination. Julie's areas of practice include: housing discrimination; racial profiling; minority health; bilingual education; and other issues affecting people with limited English proficiencies. Ms. Patiño has held prior positions as an Assistant Massachusetts Attorney General; Deputy Director for the Massachusetts State Office of Affirmative Action; and Associate, with a plaintiff's employment law firm. Ms. Patiño is also a former President of the Massachusetts Association of Hispanic Attorneys. Ms. Patiño serves on several civil rights and public interest-related boards, including the Massachusetts' Trial Court's Racial and Ethnic Access and Fairness Advisory Board and the City's Affirmative Action Advisory Committee.

HIGHLIGHTS OF 10TH ANNUAL FAIR HOUSING MONTH CELEBRATION AT CITY HALL

The Cambridge Human Rights Commission along with the Cambridge Fair Housing Committee recently held it's annual Fair Housing Award Ceremony at City Hall. This ceremony was the culmination of the Fair Housing Poster and Essay Contest, in which Cambridge public school students from grades 6-8 design posters and write essays on some aspect of Fair Housing. This year's contest theme was "With Liberty and Fair Housing for All." Almost 200 students participated in this year's contest.

The awards ceremony honored the winners of the contest as well as several individuals and organizations who have made substantial contributions to fair housing in Cambridge. State Senator Jarrett Barrios, who was the Guest Speaker, presented an inspiring speech on the history of fair housing laws. City Councilor Marjorie Decker was a witty and engaging Master of Ceremonies. This year marked the tenth anniversary of the annual contest. In honor of this anniversary, Air Jamaica generously donated two roundtrip airline tickets to anywhere the airline flies, which were given to the participating teacher whose name was drawn in a lottery held at the award ceremony. The lucky teacher who received the tickets was Al Ferreira from the Peabody School. Following are some photos taken at this event:



BETHLEHEM MEKONNEN
3rd Prize Essay
6th grade
Morse School

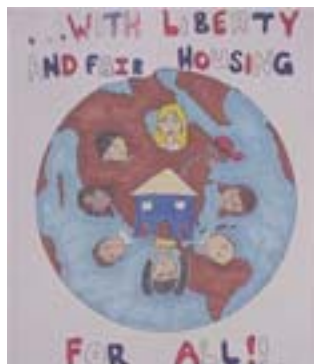


PARISS CHANDLER
1st Prize Poster
Winner
6th grade
Amigos School



MONIQUE PARÉ
3rd Prize Poster
7th grade
Peabody School

**1st PRIZE
WINNING
POSTER**



ABEER ABU-RUBIEH
4th Prize Essay
6th grade
Morse School



WINNING ESSAYS

“With Liberty and Fair Housing For All”

*by Simon Toledano
6th grade, Morse School*

I believe fair housing for all is important because if Fair Housing Laws did not exist, many people could be homeless. I especially worry about disabled people that need special care moving about. Also, I worry about people that do not speak English well and could be harassed as tenants.

“With Liberty” reminds me of the Pledge of Allegiance I say out loud in school. When I say “With Liberty” I am saying that of my own free will I will stand up for “Fair Housing for All.” What does this mean?

This means that when I become a landlord, I am going to treat all my tenants in an equal way. I will give prospective tenants the chance to apply for housing in one of my apartments so they can have a place to live even if they are disabled or have limited income from the government.

As a landlord, “With Liberty”, I will provide reasonable accommodations and equal treatment to not only disabled people but to any person that qualified for one of my apartments. The only reason I would not rent of my apartments to someone would be if they lie on the rental application I ask them to complete.

“With Liberty”, I will not be an absentee landlord. If one of my tenants has a problem with another tenant on my property I will not ignore the problem or complaint. I will try to resolve the tenant problem or complaint by giving all my tenants a copy of the Fair Housing Laws. Also, I will post a copy of the Fair Housing Laws some where on my property so that everyone can see it.

In conclusion, “With Liberty” I will be a good property owner and justly rent to everyone that qualifies. Fair Housing Laws ensure “Fair Housing for All”. Fair Housing Laws help make sure that people do not unjustly become homeless, disabled people are not discriminated and people that do not speak English are not harassed.

**Simon Toledano
1st Prize Essay Winner
6th Grade
Morse School**



With Liberty and Fair Housing for All

*By Maria Toledano
8th grade, Morse School*

I believe that fair housing is very important. It is wonderful that the residents of Cambridge have the opportunity to decide where to live. This happens without being subject to race, nationality, or disability discrimination.

“With Liberty and Fair Housing for All” may mean a number of things. For me liberty means freedom for all, I believe that it means that everyone has freedom they also should be able to have housing.

Fair housing includes many things. Let’s say for example I was a disabled person looking for housing. Fair housing would help me find a place to live. After I had a place to live the landlord would have to provide me with reasonable accommodations and there would be equal treatment provided for the other tenants and me.

Landlords have to abide by these rules and many others. They can not discriminate against any one. For example, landlords can not impose different terms and/or conditions of sale or rent to a certain class of people. Also they are not allowed to make discriminatory advertising or statements and make false statement of unavailability. These are just a few of the many rules landlords must obey. If they do not they may be fined.



Maria Toledano
2nd Prize Essay Winner
8th Grade
Morse School



INNOVATIONS IN FAIR HOUSING AWARDS

Besides the student contest awards the following individuals and organization received recognition for their compassion and willingness to work for the cause of Fair Housing to help those in need such as homeless individuals and families. This year the honorees were:

Innovations in Fair Housing – Lead Safe Cambridge
Lifetime Achievement – Norman McIver
Margot P. Kosberg Award – Margaret Keady



Congratulations to All!



STAFF OF COMMISSION

Quoc M. Tran	Executive Director
Carmen S. Negrón	Office Manager/Project Coord.
Sonja DeWitt	Investigative Attorney/Fair Housing Coord.
Joseph Johnson	Education & Outreach Coordinator
George Cheung	Curriculum Developer
Lalitha Gunturi	Student Intern

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONERS

Mercedes Sherrod Evans, Chair	
Susan Ostrander, Vice Chair	Marla Erlien
Monroe Engel	Barbara Rabin
Karen Leiter	Randa Shedid
Wallace Sherwood	Barbara Siegel
Cooper Thompson	Julie Patiño

617-349-4396 TTY 617-492-0235
www.ci.cambridge.ma.us

Discrimination Awareness

By Carmen S. Negrón

Sometimes discrimination acts aren't so clear and you might not even suspect it. Discrimination could be present in housing, in the workplace, or in your everyday dealings in and outside of your own community. Although unfortunately we cannot eliminate discrimination, awareness is the key to detecting and preventing it.

HOUSING

When a person is seeking a place to live a real estate agent could sound like s/he is trying to be helpful when they say something like, "Oh, you might like living in another part of the city" or "You might be happier living where there are more people that speak your language". In reality they are not trying to be helpful. This is called steering, which is an attempt to segregate people by their nationalities.

Also fixing up an apartment can be very costly, especially if deleading is needed, but that is part of a landlord's responsibility. A landlord cannot refuse to rent to people with children less than 6 years of age. If such people apply for an apartment and are qualified, the owner must delead. It is against the law not to rent to people with children under age 6. There are programs within the city to assist landlords in deleading.

Discrimination due to a person's source of income is common in Cambridge. It is unlawful to refuse to rent to people that have a rental subsidy such as Section 8. Some landlords do not like the paperwork involved or are afraid that they won't get their rent paid on time. If you have a Section 8 and a landlord or real estate agent says they can't rent to you because of it, you are protected by the law and can file a complaint with us.

EMPLOYMENT

One example of employment discrimination could be of a female employee who is considered one of the best employees in a company, until she tells her supervisor that she is expecting a child. Things start to change. She receives less favorable treatment. Her supervisor starts finding fault in her work and actions and she is finally fired. This could be pretext. Some companies have the erroneous belief that women with children cannot produce the same quality of work as someone without children. A woman who doesn't know her rights would just decide to look for another job after the birth of her child. However, if she decides to come to this Commission, we could investigate such a case and determine if there was indeed discrimination involved.

PUBLIC ACCOMMODATION

If someone feels like they have been treated differently when receiving a service from places such as a hospital, a restaurant, a shelter or a bank just to name a few, they can file a complaint based on public accommodation. Lets say that a woman sees a sign on the window of a barbershop that states that haircuts are \$10 and she goes in and asks for a regular haircut and the barber tries to charge her \$20. She asks why if the sign says \$10 and the barber responds that it's because that is the price for men's haircut since their hair is shorter. But her hair is just as short as a man's hair; she could have been discriminated against in providing her a service because of her sex.

Where to go if you feel you have been discriminated against? If you or anyone you know feels that they have suffered some type of discrimination in Cambridge whether in housing, employment, or services, you can call the Cambridge Human Rights Commission at 617-349-4396 and ask to speak to someone or make an appointment to file a complaint. We are located at 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor, Cambridge, MA 02139. The Commission has new brochures that describe the complaint procedure in the different languages. Thanks to a HUD grant we also have Fair Housing Brochures in the different languages.

If the discrimination act occurred in another city, then you must contact the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination at 617-994-6000.



Recent Closed Cases

By Sonja DeWitt and Lalitha Gunturi

Recently, the Commission found probable cause in two disability discrimination cases against a large property development and management company in Cambridge. One case involved a wheelchair user who was not able to have optimal use of his apartment because the elevator in the building where he lives is not compliant with the state code and is not large enough to accommodate his scooter. Several settlement options were explored and rejected by the Respondent before probable cause was found.

The other case involved a woman who, due to injuries to her hands and arms, was not able to wash dishes manually. She requested a dishwasher in her unit. While Respondent did not deny her request, she did not receive the dishwasher for over five months, due to delays and miscommunication within the management company. Reasonable settlement demands proposed by the Complainant were rejected by the Respondent prior to the finding of probable cause.

Since there was a finding of probable cause in both these cases, and subsequent mediation was unsuccessful, these cases are now being prosecuted by the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination on behalf of the complainants.

The Commission has also had several cases settle in the last few months. We have seen several complaints filed based on a landlord's failure to delead an apartment which contains or will contain children. The Commission has been successful in settling two such cases and been instrumental in helping the Complainants receive housing much earlier than they otherwise would have.

Another case that was settled was a commercial property rental, in which the tenants alleged that the landlord was harassing them based on their religious and national origin. The owner had charged the business for the electric meter for not only their business, but for the entire building. The business also received an eviction notice with no reason given. The Commission has been successful in settling the case by having the landlord reimburse the business for the overcharge in the electrical bill, as well as reinstating their lease.

In the area of employment, the Commission recently settled a case that involved an employee who alleged that he was sexually harassed on the job. The employee alleged that a co-worker exposed himself to him, and when he reported the incident to his superiors, they took no action and told him to return to work. The next day he was told that he was laid off. At a conciliation conference overseen by two of the Commissioners, the parties reached a satisfactory settlement.

These are just a few examples of complaints that the Cambridge Human Rights Commission assists with everyday. If you feel you have been discriminated against based on race, disability, source of income, national origin, marital status, age, sex, family status, military status, sexual orientation, or religion, please contact our office at (617) 349-4396.





Fair Housing v. Affordable Housing

By Sonja DeWitt



Two concepts, which are frequently confused with each other, are the concepts of fair housing and affordable housing. Affordable housing refers to efforts to create subsidized and low-rent housing for low-income tenants. The City of Cambridge has invested a lot of money and resources into creating and maintaining affordable housing. The city is justifiably proud of its efforts in this area.

Fair housing, on the other hand, refers to housing which is free of discrimination based on a protected category such as race, national origin, sex, religion, disability, and family status. Unfortunately, our case load and our interactions with other housing-related organizations in the City of Cambridge, leads us to the conclusion that fair housing is not universal in Cambridge—that discrimination is much more common and pervasive in the city than we would like to believe.

This Commission is committed to eradicating the evil of discrimination. So if you are a tenant, read our brochures, ask us any questions that you have, come to one of our trainings. Know your rights and be prepared to defend them, even by filing a formal complaint if necessary. We can also help you with informal mediation if you don't want to file a formal complaint.

If you are a landlord, know your legal obligations. A discrimination complaint against you can seriously affect your reputation as a landlord and cost you a significant amount of money. Read the law; go to trainings on fair housing issues. If you have a question about whether something is illegal, call us for advice. We're always glad to prevent discrimination before it happens.

The Cambridge Human Rights Commission does not discriminate on the basis of disability. The CHRC will provide auxiliary aids and services, written materials in alternative formats, and reasonable modifications in policies and procedures to persons with disabilities upon request. Our office is wheelchair accessible, and the TTY phone number we can be reached at is 617-492-0235.

Newsletter Produced by: Carmen S. Negrón
Edited by: Sonja DeWitt

**C
H
R
C**

Cambridge Human Rights Commission
51 Inman Street, 2nd floor
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 349-4396